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Flagship student Kallista Rehder portrays a pet as part of Photovoice.

Missoula Flagship students find voices through photography



Flagship students honed photography skills during the Photovoice project.

Students invited to reflect on wilderness

The U.S. Forest Service's Northern Region encourages all students to submit their personal reflections about wilderness – whether it's a 140-character 'tweet' or a 500-word essay. Through Sept. 4, the Forest Service is accepting the writings of students who wish to participate in the Forest Service's Wilderness Writings Challenge.

The challenge is hosted by the Forest Service's Northern Region as part of a national celebration of the passage of the Wilderness Act 50 years ago by Congress.

The challenge is open to all students. Submit your writings online at the Forest Service's Northern Region website, www.fs.usda.gov/r1 or deliver hard-copy submissions to U.S. Forest Service, attn.: Wilderness-50 Writings, 200 East Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802.

Essays should be typed, or printed in a neat and legible hand. Format can vary widely from tweet size (140 characters) to essays or poems up to 500 words.

This summer a group of 22 middle school students from C.S. Porter and Washington middle schools in Missoula participated in the Flagship Program's Photovoice project, made possible by a grant from the Montana Arts Council's Artists in Schools and Communities program.

This project aimed to empower youth in the community to tell their story and share their experience living in Missoula through photography. Photovoice is a methodology that allows individuals to reflect upon the strengths and concerns of their community.

Professional photographer Brian Christianson taught students composition, light, and the art of photography. Throughout the week, students learned how to shoot photographs, but also how to analyze works of art.

Students used their photography skills to voice their experience about living in their community and to share that unique experience with other students and community members.

"It was truly amazing to see these students come to life while learning the art of photography," says Anna-Margaret Yarbrough, coordinator of the Photovoice project. "I saw growth throughout the week in how they thought about what pictures to take and what angle the image would look best. Students loved taking photographs but they also learned to love using different techniques to make their photos look best."

The project culminated with a final showcase at ZACC Community Center on July 23.

ARTS EDUCATION

Big Sky Arts Education

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What's the big deal about arts standards?

I get really excited when I tell people that Montana is getting ready to revise their state standards for arts education (see story on page 1). Sometimes when I tell people they share my excitement, and think it's a cool thing. More often, I get a polite "Oh, that's nice" or a blank, rather puzzled look.

So, what's the big deal about revising arts standards?

If you go on the website for the Office of Public Instruction and search for a page about arts education, you won't find one. In the category of "Content Standards and Instruction," arts standards are not listed along with English Language Arts, Math and Science. If you search, you will come across one document, the Montana Standards for Arts, which briefly lists six standards that cover all the arts disciplines. They are general, not specific to music, or theater or visual art.

There are benchmarks under the standards for what students should know and be able to do in the arts by the end of 4th, 8th and 12th grade. The entire document is only 12 pages long. By comparison, the Montana Common Core Standards for English Language Arts is 67 pages.

This lack of focus on arts education is not a Montana problem, it is a national problem. The arts have received the short end of the stick in nearly every state from many years of federal No Child Left Behind/Race to the Top-era policies.

The good news is that the tide is turning. The arts are resurgent, and starting with a revision of our standards it is possible that Montana will be at the forefront of the effort to restore the arts to their place of critical importance in a high-quality education.

Standards in education are a way for educators to measure what their students know and are able to do in a content area. It is often repeated in the education world that what we can measure, we value. Improving our arts standards will increase the value of arts education across Montana.

Our new standards will be discipline-specific, which will be of huge benefit to teachers who teach in specific content areas, helping them build assessments specific to what their students are learning. Montana will even have

new standards in Media Arts!

It is an oft-cited fact that 72% of business leaders say creativity is the number-one skill they are seeking when hiring. Teaching the arts, whether it is in a stand-alone music or theatre class, or integrated into a teacher's science or history curriculum, is teaching "applied creativity."

We need stronger benchmarks to measure what high-quality teaching and learning in the arts looks like, and revising the Montana arts standards will allow us to help create the college, career and civic readiness that is the primary goal of a public school education in our state.

The business and education communities are investing in opportunities for students to develop their creative skills in the classroom that lead to future innovation in science, technology, engineering, math (STEM) and other creative industries. Studying the arts help to develop critical habits of mind – create, collaboration, communication and critical thinking, among others – that can complement STEM learning initiatives in schools.

In fact, we arts educators like to call it STEAM! With stronger arts standards that are useful to arts specialists and classroom teachers in other content areas, that "A" for arts in STEAM will help create our next generation of innovators in arts *and* in science.

Here is what excites me the most: revising the Montana Standards for the Arts is an excellent opportunity to gather groups of educators, parents, business and civic leaders across the state to engage in an important dialogue about what we would like arts education, or "applied creativity" to look like in our schools.

A lot of people are going to be involved in this effort, through focus groups, writing teams and review teams, and a lot of dialogue about arts education is going to happen. Who knows what the result of that could be? Beyond new arts standards, what new relationships, new ideas and new collaborations could happen that benefit Montana students? This is going to be good!

If you want to get involved, please contact me at ekohring@mt.gov or 406-444-6522.

Bozeman Youth Initiative hosts amateur art walks

The Bozeman Youth Initiative (BYI), a group of local high school students who plan and implement events to enhance their community, are hosting their final summer youth art walk, 6-8 p.m. Sept. 12 at Soroptmist Park. The group has participated in the Downtown Bozeman Association Art Walks, held throughout the summer on the second Friday of the month, June-September.

"The members at Bozeman Youth Initiative, myself included, came up with the idea of putting on these art walks to get young artists the exposure and experience they need to grow and develop in the art world," explains art walk coordinator Kiera Studer, a student at Bozeman High School. "Displaying is free and the artists can even sell their work without giving up any of their profits."

All genres of art are welcome and amateur artists are encouraged to sign up and display their work. Participants range from current high school students to recent graduates.

BYI does not take any portion of student profits. And thanks to the Downtown Boze-

man Association, any musicians who sign up for a spot at the art walk will be paid \$50-\$100 per performance.

"More young artists need the opportunity to share their work and learn how to sell it," says program director E.J. Porth. "I would love if even a few of these artists realized that art could be a career for them and they pursue it after high school."

The Bozeman Youth Initiative meets weekly to plan events throughout the year, which include dances, concerts, DJ Battles, service projects, art shows and more. The group encourages youth to learn new things, develop leadership skills, and take on responsibilities. The events planned by the group are created and implemented completely by the youth.

For more information about the art walks or the Bozeman Youth Initiative, email the art walks coordinator Kiera Studer at byiartwalks@outlook.com, or the programs director, E.J. Porth, at ej@bozemanouth.org.



Bozeman High students participating in a recent artwalk include (l-r): Tanner Stordahl, Kaj Bishop and Sarah Budinsky.

(Photo by E.J. Porth)